U.S. Department of the Interior

VOLUNTEERS IN PARKS

National Park Service

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Many Americans have had a love affair with the national parks since Yellowstone—our first national park—was created in 1872. Today, the National Park Service is officially entrusted with preserving more than 350 national parks in the United States. But thousands of individual citizens, citizens who want to ensure that the best of America will be protected, assist the Park Service by volunteering their time and talents.

These men and women who work side-by-side in partnership with National Park Service employees are called Volunteers in Parks, or VIPs. They are, truly, Very Important People, and you can join their ranks. VIPs care about the parks—their past, present, and future—and care about the people who come to enjoy the parks.

VIPs work in almost every park in the National Park System, from Maine to Hawaii, from Alaska to Florida, in big cities, in small towns, and in remote wilderness areas. Wherever they work, whatever their job, VIPs help the National Park Service in its challenging mission: To conserve the parks' priceless natural and historical resources *and* to provide for their enjoyment in a way that will leave them unimpaired for future generations.

If you would like to make your contribution toward assuring that your national parks will continue to be enjoyed by future generations, then consider becoming a VIP for the National Park Service. As a volunteer, you can make a difference in your own life, in the lives of others, and in the way the national parks are managed and protected.

Who Are VIPs

The many men and women who serve with the National Park Service as Volunteers in Parks are a diverse group—park neighbors, college students, retired couples, business managers, farmers, engineers, scientists, teachers, lawyers, architects, doctors, artists. . . . What they all have in common is that each has a talent or skill that is needed at the park where they volunteer. While most VIPs volunteer as individuals, organized groups, too, can volunteer. Persons under 18 years of age may become VIPs at parks in the community where they live, with the official permission of their parents or guardians. Minors who live outside the local community are accepted as volunteers only if they are part of a larger family or supervised group.

What Do VIPs Do

Volunteers in Parks are playing an ever-increasing role in the national parks, and you may be surprised at the variety of jobs that they do. Here is just a sampling:

- work at an information desk, answering visitors' questions and handing out written information
- present living history demonstrations in period costume
- write or design visitor brochures
- serve as a campground host
- drive a shuttlebus
- build fences, paint buildings, and make cabinets
- maintain a park library
- take photographs or work in a darkroom
- answer mail requests
- give guided nature walks and evening campfire programs
- assist with the preservation and treatment of museum artifacts
- maintain trails
- design computer programs for park use
- answer telephones
- conduct oral history interviews
- give environmental education programs to children
- patrol trails on foot or on horseback
- demonstrate arts and crafts skills
- organize photograph and slide files
- prepare and conduct special park events
- pick up litter along roads, trails, seashores, and rivers
- inventory underwater resources such as shipwrecks on diving expeditions
- assist resource managers and researchers by making wildlife counts, planting trees, and taking part in other projects

As even this brief list demonstrates, there are many jobs that require a wide variety of talents and skills. Once selected, VIPs are given training to acquaint them with the specific tasks they will be asked to perform and to acquaint them with the park.

Volunteers should be in reasonably good health so that they can successfully carry out their volunteer duties and responsibilities. A medical examination, paid for by the Federal Government, may be required for some jobs. Disabled individuals are encouraged to volunteer.

Working as a VIP

The national parks are special places to work. Many National Park Service employees consider themselves lucky to get paid for working in such surroundings.

As a volunteer, you will not be paid by the Federal Government. But you will have the benefit of working in a national park, and there will be other rewards as well. You may meet people from all over the United States and abroad. You may be able to make the most of a talent that you have. And you may develop new skills and gain experience that will enrich your life and assist you in present or new careers.

Some parks reimburse volunteers for some out-of-pocket expenses, such as local travel costs, meals, and uniforms, but not all parks have the funds to defray these costs. Some of these costs, and perhaps other expenses related to volunteer work, may be tax deductible.

You may work a few hours a week or month, seasonally, or full-time. You may work weekdays, weekends, during the day, or at night. The amount of time to be volunteered will be agreed on by you and your supervisor before you start. Time worked as a VIP does not count toward Federal Civil Service time if you should later become a federal employee.

Although as a volunteer you are not considered a federal employee, you are eligible for compensation for medical expenses if you are injured while performing your official volunteer duties. Also, if you should be sued for property damage or for personal injury that occurs while carrying out these duties, the Federal Government will defend you (under the Federal Tort Claims Act).

Park housing is rarely available for VIPs. Some of the larger parks may have some, but this is the exception, not the rule.

Parks may require that you wear a special uniform. Whether you wear a uniform or not, as a VIP you will be a representative of the National Park Service. Your performance should be a source of pride for yourself and for the Park Service.

How to Apply for a VIP Position

1. Write or call the VIP coordinator at the national park where you would like to volunteer and request a VIP application. You may, of course, apply to more than one park. To obtain a park address, write or call the appropriate National Park Service regional office; regional office addresses are listed on the National Park System map on the back of this brochure.

2. Complete the application and return it to the park. Be specific in describing your talents, skills, and job interests. Each park has its own needs and is looking for volunteers with the skills and talents to accomplish certain tasks. The more specific you are, the better the VIP coordinator will be able to determine whether the park has a VIP job suited for you. Include a letter if you feel the application does not permit you to provide enough information about yourself, or if you have questions about the park's VIP program. Be sure to state whether you will need park housing; remember, housing is rarely available. If you could live in your own motor home or trailer, but would require certain utility hook-ups in the park, say so.

3. The VIP coordinator will review your application and contact you, usually by mail. If your particular talents and skills appear to be ones that the park needs, you will be contacted to discuss further details. Sometimes a park finds that there is no match between an applicant's abilities and the park's needs at that time. Volunteer applicants will be notified, if this is the case.

If selected to join the ranks of VIPs, you and the National Park Service employee who will supervise you will sign an agreement. This agreement will describe your duties and responsibilities, outline a tentative work schedule, and detail other conditions of the working arrangement. And then, after appropriate training and orientation, you will begin work as the newest volunteer for the National Park Service, one of thousands of Volunteers in Parks—a VIP. Truly, a Very Important Person.

Illustration by Greg Harlin

"I'm fully retired and I want to give back to this country some of the things that it's given to me. I wouldn't volunteer if I didn't enjoy it."
Volunteer, Colonial National Historical Park, Virginia

"Everyone at the park has been very welcoming. I feel like they really appreciate what I do."
Volunteer, Crater Lake National Park, Oregon

"Every day is a learning experience. I've never had a dull day."
Volunteer, Boston National Historical Park, Massachusetts

"The park is my neighbor. I want it to be protected, and cared for. Anything I can do to take part in helping the Park Service, I'm for it."
Volunteer, Cape Hatteras National Seashore, North Carolina

"There's a lot of work that needs to be done out in the parks that wouldn't ordinarily get done. As a volunteer, I can help by doing some of that work."
Volunteer, Canyonlands National Park, Utah

"You meet people from all over the country, sometimes from all over the world, as a volunteer."
Volunteer, Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, Michigan

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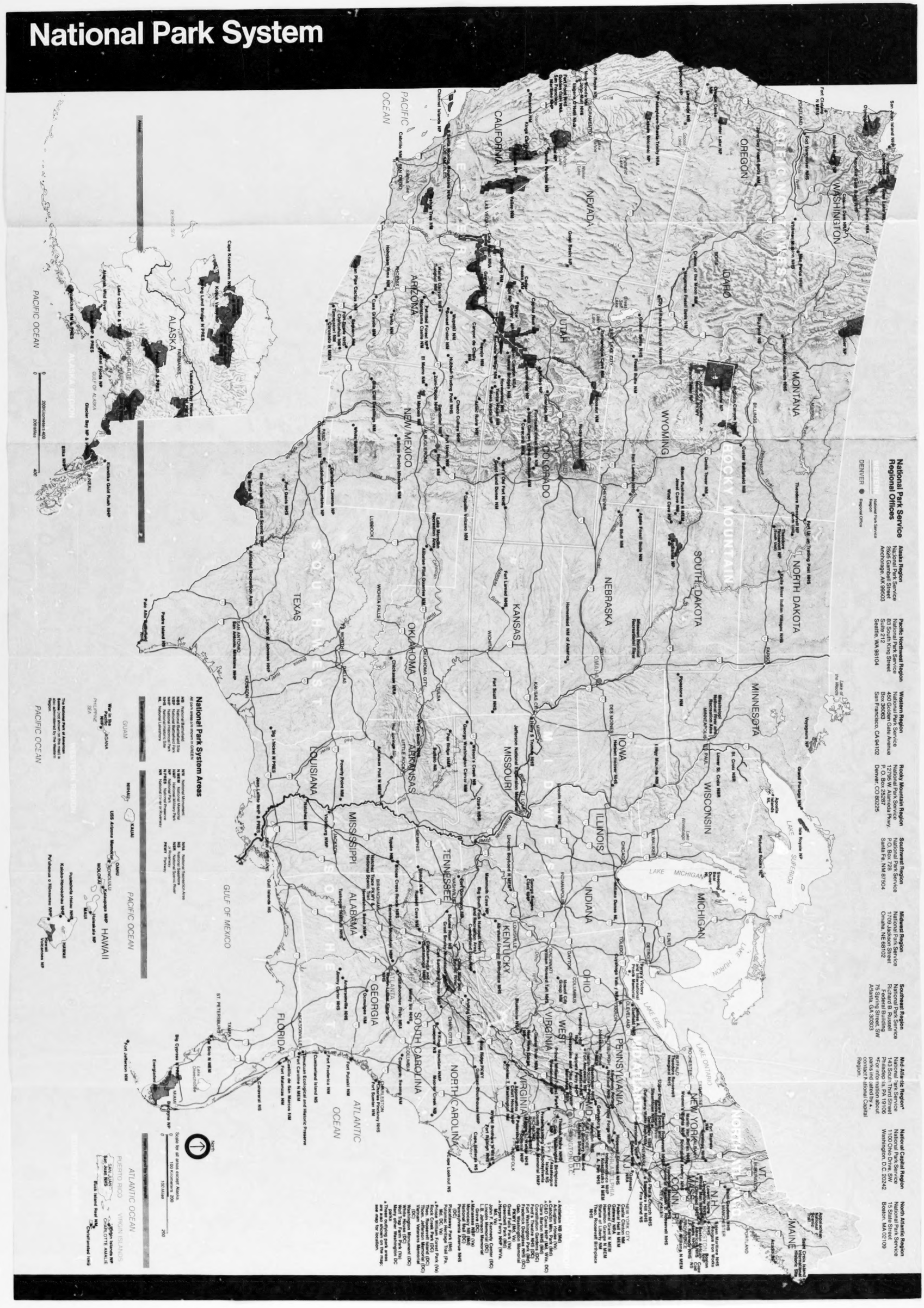
National Park System



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